United Nations

Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ UNAMIR Force Commander negotiates with Government of Rwanda and RPF to ensure safe passage and freedom of movement for military observers returning to Kigali from Nairobi; 50 expected to arrive within days.

+ United Nations Commission on Human Rights to begin special session in Geneva on Tuesday to discuss human rights situation in Rwanda.

+ World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction to begin in Yokohama on 23 May; Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs says disasters have killed 3 million people in last decade.

+ Secretary-General's Spokesman to visit former Yugoslavia with view to improving presentation of information on United Nations efforts there.

+ WFP launches major operation to aid 150,000 people displaced by recent ethnic fighting in Ghana.

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Military observers belonging to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) have already begun returning from Nairobi to Kigali, a spokesman for the Organization announced today. Meanwhile, Force Commander Romeo Dallaire has been negotiating with the Government of Rwanda and the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) to ensure safe passage and freedom of movement for the observers.

There are now 300 UNAMIR personnel in Kigali, and 50 more are expected to arrive there within days, the spokesman said. Preparations are also under way for the deployment of the balance of the Ghanaian battalion already in Rwanda, and those troops will be equipped with armoured personnel carriers. The spokesman said that operation was expected to take two weeks, but added, "We are in the hands of the Governments contributing the troops and equipment."

The Security Council, in resolution 918 (1994), yesterday increased UNAMIR's strength to 5,500 troops and expanded its mandate to provide security for civilians and humanitarian operations.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

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At the request of Canada, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights will begin a two-day special session in Geneva next Tuesday to discuss the human rights situation in Rwanda. The Canadian request was endorsed by 45 of the Commission's 53 members. The Commission is the principal United Nations body entrusted with the world-wide promotion and protection of human rights. It normally meets once a year, for six weeks, to analyse, report on and monitor those rights.

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More than 3 million people have been killed in natural disasters in the last decade, Peter Hansen, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, said this morning. In 1991-1992, such disasters resulted in economic losses of more than $100 billion. Mr. Hansen was briefing correspondents at Headquarters on the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, which will start next Monday in Yokohama, Japan.

The Conference will be the first meeting of senior policy makers, technical experts and representatives of non-governmental organizations to try to develop strategies for coping with natural disasters. It will also seek to find out why the number of natural disasters has increased greatly in the last 30 years.

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The Spokesman for the Secretary-General, Joe Sills, is undertaking a visit to the former Yugoslavia with a view to improving the presentation of information on United Nations efforts there. The need for such an improvement was among the issues raised by the Secretary-General in a high-level meeting on the former Yugoslavia in Paris last week. Mr. Sills will meet with Special Representative Yasushi Akashi during his visit, which will last one week.

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The World Food Programme (WFP) has launched a major operation to aid nearly 150,000 people displaced by recent ethnic fighting in Ghana. The WFP -- the largest food aid organization in the world -- will provide them with more than 11,000 metric tons of food for five months.

Inter-ethnic clashes in northern Ghana in February left more than 1,000 people dead, 1,500 wounded and 300 villages burned to the ground. The fighting also destroyed significant amounts of food stocks, resulting in local food shortages, according to the WFP. Northern Ghana is the country's major producer of staple crops, and the food situation could worsen if displaced people are unable to return to their villages for the planting season.

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